

Dr. Nilratan Sarkar

A legendary
Medical Scientist

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Niratan Sarkar a versatile medical scientist who has made so much contribution to medical education and Swadeshi enterprise in Colonial Bengal is yet to get a Biographer in the year of his 150th Birth Anniversary. This paper is a humble tribute to his medical genius. An

M.D and topper in M.Sc in physiology of Calcutta University ultimately became its Vice Chancellor he was the founder of Calcutta Medical Club, Indian Medical Association, Calcutta Medical School(Later R.G Kar Medical College), he also set up the Bengal Immunity Pharma to produce serums and vaccines, and an ultra modern pathological laboratory at his residence with imported machinery and an E.C.G for the first time in Calcutta. His entrepreneurship laid him to establish swadeshi industries like the National tannery, National Soap Factory, Rangamati Tea Company, Boots and Shoes Company etc. He along with P.C Ray and Satyasundar Deb heralded the industrial rejuvenation of Bengal. As a medical researcher, he was a pioneer in the treatment of cirrhosis of liver in children. He edited the Calcutta Medical Journal contributing many learned articles himself as a member of the Imperial University Commission he visited UK and was conferred the DCL of Oxford and BCL of Cambridge Universities. At home he was knighted for his overall contribution to medical research and practice.

Keywords- Nilratan Sarkar, Calcutta Medical College, Swadeshi, cirrhosis, Pathological Labs, Calcutta Medical Club and its Journal.

The 150th Birth Anniversary of Dr Nilratan Sarkar was celebrated last year, all over India and abroad, where his admirers live today. It is a pity that Dr. Sarkar is yet to get a full length biography by any discerning scholar Nilratan hailed from a poor family who migrated from Jessore to Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas. They settled down in a small village named Netra but as ill luck would have it, their cottage was washed away by river flood. They had to migrate again to Joynagar. He passed his certificate course in Medicine from a Bengali medium school in Joynagar and got a job as sub assistant surgeon under the State Medical Service. But his intense desire for higher learning led him to join Scottish Church College and complete the F.A Examination. He persevered to pass B.A Examination from Metropolitan

College. Here he got Swami Vivekananda as his classmate. Both took up school teaching at the beginning of their career. In 1885 Sarkar finally got the subject of his choice. He joined Calcutta Medical College for the M.B Degree which he passed with Distinction in 1888. He simultaneously passed B.A and M.A Examinations in physiology from Presidency College with First class. He went on to achieve the M.D Degree in 1890. But he did not join any Govt. Service. He set up his private practice and earned name and fame within a short period as a medical practitioner. Calcutta University made him a Fellow and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in 1893. His deep patriotism led him to join hands with Radhagobindo Kar and Suresh Prasad Sarbadhikari to establish a National Medical College at Belgachhia in 1916. For his versatile genius he was appointed Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University between 1919-1921. He had the opportunity to go to London as an Indian delegate to the Imperial University Commission. His talents attracted both Oxford and Cambridge Universities to confer their DCL and LLB degrees on him. On his return, he continued to work for public welfare. It was due to his initiative that the TB Hospital in Jadavpur was established and later named Kumud Shankar Roy Hospital.

At the same time, he became the Honorary Secretary of the National Council of Education and during his time, he became instrumental in establishing the Bengal Technical Institute which blossomed into the College of Engineering and Technology of Jadavpur University later. In the Medical field, he founded the Calcutta Medical Club where serious medical researches were undertaken. From this platform, he published his research work on Cirrhosis of Liver in Children. For this research, he had to deeply study the comparative value of mother's milk, cow milk and goat milk to find out the merit of the first one. To observe the impact of climate on such children, he had to take his patient to Darjeeling Hill Station. This was a path-breaking research at a time when this disease caused a huge casualty among children. Dr. Sarkar had controlled this pandemic by altering food and drink and applying suitable medicine.

He was a little engine which knew no rest. He was also a leading entrepreneur of Swadeshi Enterprise. He founded the National Tannery, National Soap Factory, Rangamati Tea Company which came to be known as the Eastern Tea Company. He invested his medical income in these enterprises. In 1908 he became the

Director of The Boot & Equipment Company. He was an intimate friend of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and substantially helped Ray's Bengal Chemical & Pharmaceutical Works. Sarkar, Roy, Kartik, Bose and Satya Sundar Deb pioneered the Swadeshi economic revolution. For his multifarious achievements and curing of the carbuncle of Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, Sarkar was knighted by the Government. He also acted as a trustee of The Bose Institute, Visva Bharati and Indian Museum. In short, he was omnipresent in the reconstruction work of 20th century Bengal.

Dr. Sarkar's contribution to National politics was immense. In 1890 he joined the Indian National Congress and remained its member till 1919. These were the crucial years in Indian politics. The Moderates and Extremists had fallen apart leaving a void in national politics. Dr. Sarkar still served it as its sheet anchor. He became a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and served it between 1912 and 1927. He earned quite a fortune as a medical practitioner, and spent most of it in public welfare. He began a Medical School which has now been designated in his name. Of his disciples, the most famous was Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. We have a valuable estimate of Dr. Nilratan Sarkar by Dr. B. C. Roy as follows... I happened to be present at a case which he came to treat. Gentle in manners ... in his demeanour and his behavior towards the relatives and friends, he inspired the fullest confidence in the patient. It was his nature, I found, to patiently listen to the detailed enumeration of the patient's symptoms, to observe the minute signs and symptoms of the disease and variations from the normal and to correlate the cause and effect of every such observation.

Another legendary disciple of Dr. Sarkar, Dr. J. C. Bandopadhyay also makes a very authentic estimate of Dr. Sarkar's ingenuity as a physician, "after listening to the history of the patient, he would examine him thoroughly and then go through the reports of various investigations. Thereafter, he would closet himself with attending physicians and other colleagues if any, in a separate room, and discuss in detail the clinical and laboratory findings before arriving at a diagnosis. Then he would suggest the lines of treatment." About the source of disease, Dr. Sarkar had the following to say,

“At the root of all evils is our terrible ignorance – ignorance of the origins, nature symptoms and course of this disease (tuberculosis), ignorance of the method of treatment of this disease, ignorance of measures to be adopted to check its spread.”

In his eagerness to provide pathological support to treatment, Nilratan established a clinical laboratory in his residence at 61, Harrison Road. Here all kinds of liquid excretions of human bodies would be examined. After this, when he moved to his Short Street residence, he imported an E. C. G. machine along with other equipments. Thus, he could provide ultra-modern treatment to his patients. In search of standard medicine, he founded The Bengal Immunity, a branded medicine manufacturing company which produced all kinds of serum and vaccine. It saved huge amount of foreign exchange. The co-founder of the company were Dr. B. C. Roy and Dr. Koilash Chandra Basu. Henceforth, Bengal Immunity produced all kinds of serum and vaccines including extracts from horse to fight hydrophobia.

He also established the Indian Medical Association, the First Club of medical practitioners which also published the Journal of Indian Medical Association edited by Sarkar for long 12 years. This became the reliable Bulletin of public health.

In summary, we should not forget that Dr. Nilratan Sarkar was a high profile Medical Scientist and Teacher. He taught bio-chemistry for 2 years from 1894 – 96 invited by Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar at the IACS. Dr. Sarkar with Dr. Radhagobinda Kar and Dr. S. P. Sarbadhikary joined hands to establish the Calcutta Medical School which was finally shifted to Belghachhia in 1899. At that time, it was renamed Carmichael Medical School after the name of the Governor. After the death of R. G. Kar, it was finally named R. G. Kar Medical College the first Indian Medical College established by Indians. A large number of Indian medical students got their degree there. As the first President of the college, he spent huge money and labour to give it a sound footing. Besides, Champbell Medical School, where Nilratan studied was renamed Nilratan Sarkar Medical College after his death thanks to the efforts of Dr. B.C. Roy, his favourite student.

Yet after all these achievements, Dr. Sarkar is yet to get a biographer.

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